

# The Oneida Lake Bulletin

Summer 2005

## White Perch - Oneida Lake's Undervalued Resource

By Richard Colesante and Thomas Chiotti

White perch provide superb action on light tackle. White perch make for succulent table fare. Yet, most anglers visit Oneida Lake to fish for walleyes, bass, and yellow perch and few realize that over 1,000,000 adult white perch also roam the lake. These fishers miss some great sport and dining by ignoring Oneida's greatly undervalued whites.

The white perch is a member of the "true bass" family that includes the saltwater striped bass and the white bass (often called "silver bass" on the lake). Originally a brackish water species that thrived in east coast estuaries, the white perch became widely distributed by migrating through New York State's canal system.

Whites are prized fish in Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and New Jersey. Thousands of anglers congregate when "the whites are running" in the waters of these states. However, Oneida Lake anglers tend to overlook this desirable panfish. This is unfortunate, not only because of lost recreational and food opportunities, but also because harvesting white perch may be beneficial to the future of Oneida's walleye and yellow perch fishing.

White perch directly compete with yellow perch for food and could diminish yellow perch growth and reproductive success. They evolved to produce extremely high numbers of young to offset the mortality that often occurs in their native, brackish environment. If two white perch were placed in a lake and only one percent of their young survived, their population would increase to more than 2,000,000 in just four years!

If abundant, white perch will consume walleye fry. We believe that this occurs in Otisco and Cross Lakes. If they become too abundant, they dominate the lakes' ecosystems and become stunted because food is not plentiful enough to maintain good growth.

Anglers can prevent this from happening in Oneida Lake by catching and keeping white perch.

White perch often eat the eggs of other fish. They can be located in early spring along the shore or in the mouths of the tributaries where walleyes and yellow perch spawn. Oneida Creek and the Barge Canal at Sylvan Beach are noted hotspots for white



White perch are excellent sport and table fish.

Photo - Karen Howlett

perch spring action. The fish travel in large schools and, by using a two-hook rig, anglers can easily land doubles.

During the summer, white perch constantly travel in search of food. These fish seem to prefer the central and eastern portions of Oneida Lake. They love the lake's rocky reefs. The areas around Dakin, Shackelton, and Messenger's Shoals (Buoy 113) contain huge white perch concentrations. Whites can be found along the sandy bottom off Sylvan and Verona Beaches. The Oneida Creek Bar area, which stretches from the creek mouth to Lewis Point, attracts large schools. These fish prefer depths ranging from 10 to 20 feet.

Trolling or drifting spinner and worm rigs are good ways to locate white perch. If you catch one, anchor immediately. Use pieces of worms on #4 or #6 hooks. Whites easily steal whole crawlers from hooks. Be prepared for some fast action. Harvests of 100 to 200 white perch are common in Oneida Lake.

When walleyes, bass, or jack perch aren't cooperating, locate a school of white perch and diversify your Oneida Lake interests. You will be pleasantly surprised at their eating qualities (see our "fishing corner" on page 3). Most importantly, however, you will be helping to maintain healthy yellow perch and walleye populations in Oneida.

## President's Message

As the newly elected Oneida Lake Association president, I would like to take this opportunity to share some of our objectives that will be addressed over the upcoming two years.

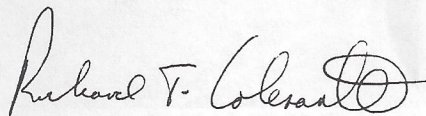
First and foremost is our membership, which we hope to increase by at least one-third by 2007. We have scheduled another zip code mailing in the Cleveland area and will promote new and sustained memberships with other incentives devised by our membership committee. We will work to improve publicity as it relates to the OLA so that current and prospective members will know more about what our organization does and represents.

Better boat access on the lake's East End is one of our identified needs. There has been discussion with the NYSDEC and the Thruway Authority regarding this issue. The OLA recognizes the problem and regards improved East End access as a priority.

The Oneida Lake Association is a strong organization; we have an energetic, hard working board of directors and a solid membership. We will continue our deep commitment to lake issues dealing with water levels, cormorants, water chestnuts, law enforcement, and fisheries. We will keep our membership informed through our semi-annual *Bulletins* and other mailings.

Our goal is to preserve and protect Oneida Lake into the future. We can accomplish this with the united efforts of our membership and directors.

Have a marvelous summer.



Richard Colesante  
President – Oneida Lake Association

## Pirro Issues Proclamation Honoring OLA

Onondaga County Executive Nicholas Pirro made an unscheduled appearance at the OLA's annual meeting and delivered the following official proclamation:

Whereas, The Oneida Lake Association has been devoted to the preservation and improvement of Oneida Lake since 1945; and

Whereas, The Oneida Lake Association was founded by a group of environmental visionaries led by Dr. Benjamin Sauer, Eric Will, Richard Brown, Max Frey, and Ted Cramer. The Association has worked to provide sound management practices, improved lake access, and minimize threats to the lake's ecosystem and future; and

Whereas, Due, in large measure, to the efforts of the Oneida Lake Association,

Oneida Lake remains one of the most outstanding walleye, bass, and yellow perch fisheries in the nation; and

Whereas, The Oneida Lake Association Board of Directors and its active and involved membership's effectiveness has been most recently demonstrated by its success in lobbying the governor and state officials to limit the population of double-crested cormorants.

Now, therefore I, Nicholas J. Pirro, County Executive of the County of Onondaga, do hereby proclaim April 27, 2005 to be...

Oneida Lake Association  
60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary  
Community Recognition Day

## The Oneida Lake Association Inc.

Founded in 1945

The Bulletin is published by the Oneida Lake Association, Inc. so that its members may be informed regarding the activities of the Association. The Oneida Lake Association, Inc., was organized in 1945 to restore and preserve the natural resources of Oneida Lake and its environs.

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...in the County of Onondaga, and I join with our citizens to commend the officers and members of the Oneida Lake Association as they celebrate 60 years of commitment to the improvement of Oneida Lake as an environmental and recreational resource.

The OLA thanks County Executive Pirro.

Recently, the NYSDEC proposed that bass fishing be opened throughout the calendar year. Anglers could fish for, but not keep, bass during the formerly closed season that runs from December 1 to the third Saturday in June.

The board of directors of the Oneida Lake Association has unanimously approved a motion to oppose year-round bass fishing on Oneida Lake. The reasons for the board's decision read as follows:

The risks to Oneida Lake associated with year-round bass fishing are unknown. A variety of factors, especially the imminent invasion of round gobies, holds the health of the lake's ecosystem in a very delicate balance. The OLA generally supports expanding angling opportunities, but

until the effects of this invader and others yet to come are better understood, we feel strongly that this particular expansion could damage our vibrant bass fishery.

The argument that year-round bass fishing will solve a law enforcement problem does not hold true for Oneida Lake. We believe that year-round bass fishing will create more, not fewer, headaches for law enforcement.

The OLA and the NYSDEC have partnered closely for the last 60 years to protect Oneida Lake. Those who have been involved are aware that springtime bass fishing would give illegal anglers an excuse to take large numbers of spawning walleyes out of season while posing as bass fishermen. This situation threatens the

health of our walleye fishery and it should be avoided. To prevent this potential poaching, the DEC would need to devote greater resources to patrolling the lake, as well as its tributaries.

Oneida Lake is different from other bodies of water in the state. Regulations that might work elsewhere have the potential to damage the lake. The OLA believes that the exemption of Oneida Lake from liberalized bass fishing regulations is consistent with DEC policy, which recognizes that certain regulations do not work universally.

The board of directors urges the OLA membership to contact the DEC and voice their disapproval with this proposed regulation change.

## The OLA Fishing Corner



### Please Pass the White Perch!

Prepared properly, white perch are delicious. Several practices should be followed, however, to insure maximum good taste.

First, ice the fish when you catch them. Fish die quickly and begin to spoil in warm weather. Keeping whites on a stringer or in a bucket of water promotes decomposition and this makes for bad eating.

Secondly, fillet the fish carefully. Remove the fatty strip along the fillet's dorsal (top) side. Remove as much of the reddish vein that goes along the fillet's center as possible. You can do this by angling your knife slightly upward when skinning the fillet.

Third, if you freeze the fillets, freeze them in water. This seals their flavor and allows you to keep them for several months. Zip-lock type freezer bags make ideal containers.

White perch are excellent when fried. Beat several eggs, add a cup of milk, and

soak the fillets for a few minutes. Roll them in seasoned breadcrumbs and fry in your favorite oil.

"White perch scampi" is bound to please. Rub the fillets with garlic powder and oregano. Lightly salt and pepper each fillet. Broil in butter (yogurt "butter" makes an excellent, healthier substitute) for about 15 minutes, basting with the melted liquid about half way through. Check the fillets at about the 12-minute mark to ensure that they don't burn.

Whites make a fine fish chowder. For this recipe, you'll need 4 slices of bacon, cut in small pieces. In addition, set aside 2 cups of peeled and diced potatoes and one-half cup of diced onions. One pound of white perch fillets, 3 cups of milk, and one-half cup of water fill out the order. Fry the bacon until brown. Add the potatoes, onions, and water. Lightly salt and pepper the mixture and cook for about 10 minutes. Add the fish and continue cooking,

covered, until the potatoes are done. Garnish with parsley, if you like, and savor the chowder.

You can make an interesting "mock lobster" from white perch. Blend one-half cup of mayonnaise with one-half cup of milk. Soak the fillets in this mixture and roll them in crushed Ritz crackers. Place them on a baking sheet that's been coated with a non-sticking cooking spray. Top the fillets with grated or shredded cheese and bake in an oven set at 375 degrees for about 15 to 20 minutes.

"White perch with vegetables" is a healthy alternative that works well in summer. Saute a pan of thinly sliced zucchini, peppers, and onions until almost cooked. Add your favorite spices to the vegetables while they simmer. Make several 8-inch square cooking pouches from aluminum foil. Place canned diced tomatoes (the Italian version are especially good), some of the sautéed mixture, and 4 to 6 white perch fillets in each pouch. Seal the pouches thoroughly. Cook them on your grill for about 15 minutes, turning once. This white perch garden medley is absolutely delicious.

## Necrology - Marshall O. Naumann, Jr.

The Oneida Lake Association is saddened by the passing of director Marshall O. Naumann, Jr., who departed this life on May 26, 2005, at his home in Syracuse. "Marsh" was a grand gentleman whose abilities, dedication, and spirit graced our Association for over 35 years.

After graduation from high school, Marsh served in the Navy during World War II. He matriculated at Lemoyne College, majoring in biology, and was a member of its initial graduating class in 1951. His first appointment was with the International Harvester Corporation. From there he advanced to become a certified CLU agent with Mass Mutual, a title he held throughout the majority of his career.

Marsh was an avid sportsman who

enjoyed hunting, fishing, golf, and bird watching. He loved to recall tales of his fly fishing adventures on numerous Central New York streams and rivers. He spent rich hours at his family's camp in Constantia and delighted in the excellent bass fishing that Oneida Lake offers.

Marsh joined the OLA's board of directors around 1970 and served as the organization's president for several terms. He was the Association's membership chairman for many years and, under his leadership, numbers in this category reached a zenith. Marsh also represented the OLA at numerous outdoor sporting shows and regularly chaired the popular, successful annual "take a kid fishing" contest. His good hu-



mor and wise counsel enhanced many board of directors' meetings.

Marsh leaves his wife of 54 years, Patricia; two brothers, Paul and Ronald; four children, Marshall III, Kristen, Stephen, and Howard; seven grandchildren, Sarah, Caroline, Andrew, Nicholas, Tyler, Erica, and Stephen Cooper, plus several nieces and

nephews.

Marshall Naumann dedicated a great portion of his life to the preservation and protection of Oneida Lake. Loyal to the OLA to the end, he willed that contributions in his memory be made to the Association.

## Ripples

Having trouble catching walleyes this summer? Try this excellent tip from Charter Captain Ray Brown. Walleyes are chasing bait and, thus, moving a lot. Investigate the shallows, near weed lines. Minnow concentrations have been high in these areas, consequently attracting pike. Work your way gradually to deeper water, checking your fish finders constantly. When you spot fish, drift across them, slowly bouncing a black and purple jig, tipped with a fat nightcrawler, off bottom. Adding a few short tinsel strands to the jig sometimes helps attract choosy walleyes.

Congratulations to Cornell Field Station Director Ed Mills, who received the Christie-Loftus Award for "distinguished contributions to healthy Great Lakes' ecosystems" from the Great Lakes Fisheries Commission on June 7.

This is the first year that this joint Canadian-American agency has given the award. The honor couldn't go to a more deserving person.

Senior APHIS biologist Rich Chipman reports excellent results from this spring's cormorant hazing program. As of June 13, Oneida Lake housed "151 cormorants and the number is dropping," according to Chipman. This is far less than last year's census and sparks optimism that the summer's hazing's effectiveness will exceed last year's.

In another encouraging note, biologist Chipman reported that this was the first year the number of cormorant nests on the lake's islands dropped below 100. The APHIS crew removed 80 nests and oiled the eggs on the remaining 20.

New Castle's Disease has infected some cormorants throughout the United States. If you find a dead cormorant, please notify the United States Fish and Wildlife Service Office at Castleton-on-Hudson. Their number is 518-477-4837.

Don't wait until fall to pursue Oneida Lake's jumbo jack perch. Lead line trollers have been catching perch on jugged flutter spoons all through July. Jacks visit weed beds in early August and are vulnerable to small worms, twister jigs, crawfish, and minnows.

Jack Henke will speak about Oneida Lake history at Sylvan Beach's Union Chapel on Sunday, August 7, at 7 p.m. This slide-lecture program is free.

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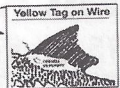
Sturgeon in Oneida Lake and nearby waters may be tagged. Biologists at Cornell University and NYSDEC need your help to track these fish. Yellow tags may be attached at the base of the dorsal fin. If you catch a tagged sturgeon, please write down the number on the tag and length of fish, release the fish immediately, and call Cornell University at (315) 633-9243 or contact NYSDEC at (315) 785-2262 as soon as possible.



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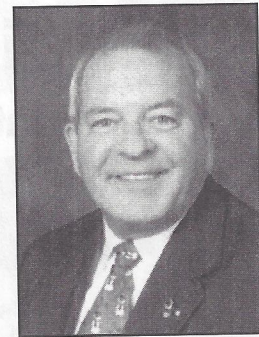
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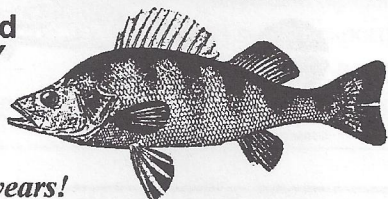
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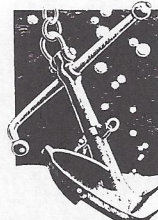
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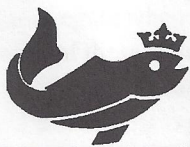
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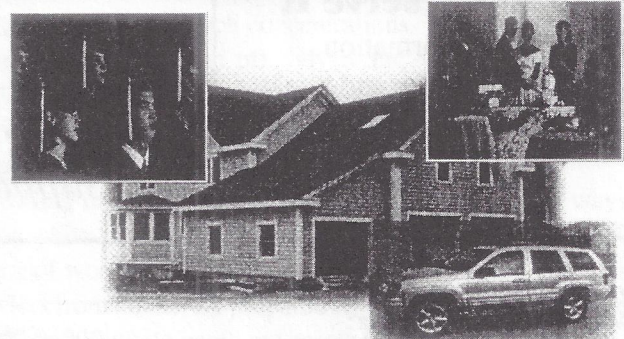
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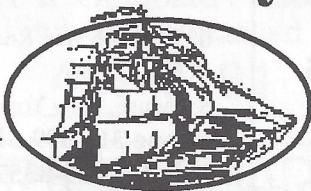
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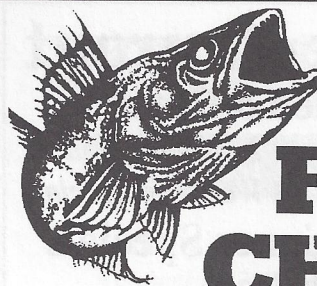
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